

Keith Mehlin: 'Silent' night would be gift for police, soldiers

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"Silent night, holy night,

All is calm, all is bright"

- Tune: Holy Night, F. Grueber, 1818

When I was younger and on the night shift, I worked often on Christmas Eve, and most of the time the first words of "Silent Night" described those shifts. After 1 a.m. or so on Christmas Eve, it can get pretty quiet. There are and were exceptions, for instance the one Christmas Eve I found a store front kicked in by burglars around 2 in the morning.

Another cruiser, coming to help me, piled into an Amtrak train on South Main. Fortunately the officer, who has since retired, was not hurt; how I don't know after looking at the car. Maybe that was our Christmas Miracle.

Christmas Eve on the afternoon shift can, and often is, just the opposite. Many times that night is busier than New Year's Eve. I can still remember one Christmas Eve that will always probably stand out, and I was not even working.

The night was made for Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, damp and very foggy. A bank building blew up on West Broadway, completely destroying the building and killing one person. A terrible traffic accident on North 16th Street just north of Big Lake Road killed six people, plus many more calls including one to the church service I was attending where a well-known thief came in during services and stole items from the basement of the church while the worshipers were upstairs.

I often thought of the first lyrics of "Silent Night" while working on Christmas Eve, knowing at the end of my shift I got to go home to my family. Our soldiers who are fighting overseas in various theaters such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo will probably also think of those lyrics while pulling their shifts or accomplishing their mission. Unfortunately, they cannot go home after the shift is over.

I am thinking about this because one of our police officers/soldiers was home on leave for a short time this month. Officer Dan Dawson, who is also a military policeman in the Reserves, got a 15-day pass from his duties in Iraq. I got to talk to him for only a short time. He is stationed very near Baghdad and had some fascinating stories.

All the time I was listening to him tell about his duties, the Iraqi people, the morale of the troops and the mission in Iraq, I was thinking about how fortunate this country is to have men and women like Officer Dawson, who is accomplishing a mission in a dangerous far-off place so that we may live safely in this country.

The department has another police officer/soldier pulling duty in a far-off country. Officer Greg Casey, a brand new officer just graduated from the academy, is now stationed in Kosovo for one year. Greg just got married before he left. I am sure his wife wishes he was pulling a shift on the streets of Council Bluffs, not Kosovo, this Christmas.

Dan' s father, Dave Dawson, is also a police officer for the Council Bluffs Police Department. Dave is a hard-nosed cop who is one of the hardest working officers on the department. This has to be a very hard Christmas for him and his wife, having their son pulling duty in Baghdad.

Here' s hoping that our armed forces have a "silent night" on Christmas Eve, and that every other day they serve is "calm and bright" so they can come home in one piece.

While you are with friends and family this Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, take a minute to think about the men and women of this great country, past and present, who have served in the armed forces and spent time away from home in harms way so that you can live in peace in the greatest country on earth.

While you are at it, take another minute to think about the police officers who are out there while you are with your family, doing their best to make you safe here at home in Council Bluffs.

And from the men and women of the Council Bluffs Police Department, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

- Keith Mehlin is chief of the Council Bluffs Police Department